

Iraqi EFL Secondary School Students Speaking Performance and SWOT Strategy Affect

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Abstract

Speaking performance refers to learners' ability to express themselves clearly and appropriately through spoken language and includes fluency, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and vocabulary use. It plays a vital role in developing communicative competence in EFL contexts where real-life speaking opportunities are limited. This study investigates the effect of the SWOT strategy on the speaking performance of Iraqi EFL secondary school students. A quasi-experimental design was applied to a sample of 60 fifth-grade female students divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught using the SWOT strategy, while the control group followed traditional methods. The results showed a significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking performance, particularly in fluency.

Keywords: (SWOT Strategy, Speaking Performance, EFL Learners).

اثر استراتيجية SWOT في تحسين الأداء الشفهي لطلبة المرحلة الإعدادية من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في العراق

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الملخص

يشير أداء التحدث إلى قدرة المتعلم على التعبير عن نفسه بوضوح وبشكل مناسب من خلال اللغة المنطوقة، ويتضمن الطلاقة والدقة النحوية والنطق واستخدام المفردات. وتكمن أهميته في تنمية الكفاءة التواصلية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية حيث تقل فرص الممارسة الواقعية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة أثر استراتيجية SWOT في تحسين أداء التحدث لدى طالبات المرحلة الإعدادية في العراق. اعتمدت الباحثة التصميم شبه التجريبي على عينة مكونة من ٦٠ طالبة قُسمن إلى مجموعتين تجريبية وضابطة. دُرست المجموعة التجريبية باستخدام استراتيجية SWOT بينما اتبعت المجموعة الضابطة الطريقة التقليدية. أظهرت النتائج تفوق المجموعة التجريبية وتحسن أدائها في مهارة التحدث ولاسيما في الطلاقة. الكلمات المفتاحية: (استراتيجية SWOT، أداء التحدث، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية).

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Problem and Its Significance

Speaking performance is one of the main skills in teaching English as a Foreign Language, as it reflects learners' ability to speak fluently and interactively in real time. It requires the simultaneous use of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and pragmatic knowledge, which makes it particularly challenging for EFL learners. In contexts such as Iraq, where English is not used in daily life, developing speaking performance remains a major pedagogical challenge (Goh & Burns, 2022).

Despite years of English instruction, many Iraqi secondary school students still experience difficulties in speaking performance due to the focus on grammar, translation, and written exams. Limited oral practice leads to low

fluency, hesitation, anxiety, and avoidance of spontaneous speech, which negatively affects academic achievement and real-life communication (Raooft et al., 2021).

Speaking performance is essential for academic success, future career opportunities, and social interaction. Learners with stronger speaking performance are more able to participate in discussions, express ideas clearly, and engage in multilingual environments, while also supporting the development of other skills such as listening and critical thinking (Sadeghi et al., 2021).

Traditional teaching methods in Iraqi EFL classrooms are mainly teacher-centered and offer few opportunities for meaningful oral interaction. The lack of goal-setting, self-evaluation, and learner reflection reduces autonomy and motivation, hindering speaking performance development and highlighting the need for learner-centered instructional strategies (Namaziandost et al., 2021).

The SWOT strategy, originally developed for strategic planning, has been adapted for educational purposes to promote reflection, self-awareness, and strategic learning. By identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, learners can better understand their speaking performance abilities and take responsibility for improvement. This study examines the effect of using the SWOT strategy on the speaking performance of Iraqi EFL secondary school students through a quasi-experimental design comparing experimental and control groups (Al-Hamadani, 2021; Alzubi, 2020; Derakhshan et al., 2022).

1.2 The Aim of the Study

The present study aims at finding out the effect of SWOT strategy on Iraqi EFL secondary Students' speaking performance.

1.٣ Limits

This study is limited to Iraqi EFL female secondary students fifth grade (scientific section) in Al-Yarmouk secondary school at speaking performance for the academic year 2024/2025. and the speaking (dialogs) in their textbook (English for Iraq -fifth secondary school)

1.4 The Value of the Study

The present study is hoped to be beneficial for:

1. The study supports educators and researchers in developing students' speaking performance using the SWOT strategy.
2. It guides curriculum designers and institutions in adopting learner-centered and strategic teaching approaches.
3. The study enhances learners' speaking performance, motivation, and self-awareness.
4. The research directly supports learners by promoting a teaching approach that enhances their speaking performance ability and self-awareness. It aims to foster greater learner engagement, motivation, and autonomy in the language learning process.

2. Literature review

2.1 Speaking Performance

Speaking performance is a core component of communicative language competence and a key indicator of learners' mastery of a target language. It involves producing grammatically correct utterances while using language fluently, appropriately, and meaningfully in real-time communication (Goh & Burns, 2022). In EFL contexts, limited exposure to authentic language use increases the complexity of speaking performance, which includes fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse management as identified by the CEFR (2020).

Effective speaking performance requires coordination between cognitive, linguistic, and social processes and should be viewed as an interactive and strategic activity rather than isolated sentence production (Luoma, 2020).

In contexts such as Iraq, learners face challenges related to anxiety, limited vocabulary, and insufficient communicative practice, often reinforced by traditional teaching methods that emphasize grammar and written skills (Al-Khafaji, 2021; Zhang, 2023).

Communicative and task-based approaches provide meaningful opportunities for language use in realistic contexts. Interaction, feedback, and low-anxiety classroom environments support speaking performance development, while activities such as role-plays, discussions, and presentations enhance fluency and confidence (Derakhshan et al., 2021; Bygate & Samuda, 2020). In addition, performance-based assessment using analytic rubrics enables teachers to evaluate multiple speaking components and provide focused feedback (Galaczi & Taylor, 2021).

Affective factors play a significant role in speaking performance development. Foreign language speaking anxiety reduces learners' willingness to communicate, whereas supportive environments and reflective practices enhance motivation and confidence, leading to improved speaking performance outcomes (Horwitz, 2022; Peng, 2023).

2.1.1 Types of Speaking Performance in EFL

Understanding the nature of speaking performance is crucial for EFL teachers aiming to develop learners' communicative competence in diverse contexts. Categorizing speaking performance by interaction type enables educators to design activities that support learners' development from controlled production to fluent extended discourse.

1. Interaction-Based Typology

Adapted from Brown (2001), this typology distinguishes six types of classroom speaking performance activities arranged from controlled to highly interactive communication.

1.1 Imitative Speaking Performance

This is the most controlled type of speaking performance, where learners repeat isolated words or phrases to practice pronunciation, intonation, stress, or rhythm. Although it involves no real communicative exchange, it is essential for developing phonological awareness and accurate speech production (Gilakjani, 2021; Derakhshan & Karimi, 2022).

1.2 Intensive Speaking Performance

Intensive speaking performance involves short utterances focusing on specific linguistic elements such as grammar or pronunciation. Activities include read-aloud exercises and sentence completion tasks, helping learners develop sentence-level fluency under controlled conditions (Hashemi & Sahragard, 2021).

1.3 Responsive Speaking Performance

Responsive speaking performance consists of short replies to questions or remarks in greetings, requests, or simple exchanges. These responses help learners develop initial conversational skills and confidence in real-time interaction (Taheri et al., 2022).

1.4 Transactional Dialogue

Transactional dialogue extends responsive speech into longer interactions aimed at exchanging information, such as asking for directions or buying goods. It requires coherent language use and management of turn-taking and negotiation (Zhang & Rahimi, 2023).

1.5 Interpersonal Dialogue

Interpersonal speaking performance focuses on social interaction rather than information exchange. It includes small talk and casual conversation and depends on pragmatic competence and cultural awareness (Gao & Zhang, 2022).

1.6 Extensive Monologue

Extensive speaking performance involves longer planned or spontaneous speech such as presentations or storytelling. It requires discourse

organization, sustained fluency, and higher-order cognitive skills, reflecting real-world speaking demands (Ahmadi & Khatib, 2020).

2.2 The Origin of SWOT and Its Internal and External Factors

The SWOT strategy, which stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, originated in the field of business and strategic planning but has been increasingly applied in educational contexts. According to Gürel and Tat (2017), SWOT analysis enables individuals to evaluate internal and external factors that influence performance and decision-making. In language learning, SWOT analysis promotes metacognitive awareness by encouraging learners to reflect on their abilities and learning conditions (Panagiotou, 2020).

In EFL education, SWOT strategy has been used to enhance learner autonomy and self-regulated learning. Identifying strengths and weaknesses helps learners set realistic goals, while recognizing opportunities and threats allows them to plan effective strategies for improvement (Zhang & Gao, 2021). Studies have shown that reflective strategies such as SWOT analysis positively influence learners' motivation and engagement, particularly in speaking performance tasks (Yusuf et al., 2023).

Empirical research supports the effectiveness of SWOT strategy in improving speaking performance. Al-Mutairi and Al-Harhi (2021) found that EFL students who engaged in regular SWOT reflection demonstrated significant improvement in fluency and accuracy compared to those taught through traditional methods.

Similarly, Hassan and Abdullah (2022) reported reduced speaking anxiety and increased classroom participation among students using SWOT analysis. These findings suggest that SWOT strategy fosters awareness, confidence, and strategic planning, which are essential for successful speaking performance development.

2.2.1 Core Components of SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis—comprising Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats—is a metacognitive framework that enables language learners to engage in structured self-assessment and strategic planning, which is particularly beneficial in developing speaking performance skills that require integrative language use and real-time performance (Gurel & Tat, 2017).

1- Strengths

Strengths refer to internal resources and skills that learners can use to enhance speaking performance proficiency, such as strong vocabulary knowledge, accurate pronunciation, fluency, self-confidence, and intrinsic motivation (Brown, 2007; MacIntyre, 2017). In Iraqi EFL contexts, strengths may include exposure to English-language media, participation in English clubs, and personal interest in English culture, which support confidence and positive risk-taking in speaking performance tasks (MacIntyre, 2017).

2- Weaknesses

Weaknesses are internal limitations that hinder speaking performance development, including limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, pronunciation problems, lack of fluency, and language anxiety (Brown, 2007; MacIntyre, 2017). These issues are often intensified in Iraqi classrooms characterized by rote learning and limited communicative practice (Al-Issa, 2020). Identifying weaknesses enables learners to set targeted goals and apply appropriate learning strategies (Oxford, 2017).

3- Opportunities

Opportunities are external factors that learners can exploit to improve speaking performance, such as technology-based tools, supportive teachers or peers, and access to authentic English materials. The use of multimodal resources encourages autonomous learning through SWOT analysis (Soler

Pardo, 2020), while widespread smartphone use in Iraq provides additional opportunities for speaking practice beyond the classroom (Viberg & Kukulska-Hulme, 2021).

4- Threats

Threats are external conditions that negatively affect speaking performance development, including large class sizes, exam-oriented instruction, limited speaking practice, and fear of negative evaluation (Al-Issa, 2020; Brown, 2007). Foreign language anxiety further reduces learners' willingness to communicate, highlighting the need for supportive classroom environments and collaborative speaking tasks (Phillips, Gregersen & Horwitz).

Table 2.1: SWOT Analysis Framework for EFL Speaking Performance

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|--|
| - Strong vocabulary in familiar topics | - Pronunciation difficulties with certain sounds |
| - Confidence in group discussions | - Limited use of complex grammatical structures |
| - Effective use of body language | - Hesitation and frequent pauses during speech |
| - Good comprehension of spoken English | - Reliance on memorized phrases |

| Opportunities | Threats |
|---|---|
| - Access to online English-speaking performance platforms | - Lack of English-speaking performance environment outside school |
| - Participation in English language clubs | - Fear of making mistakes leading to silence |
| - Exposure to English media (films, podcasts) | - Negative peer feedback affecting confidence |
| - Supportive teachers encouraging speaking performance | - Limited classroom time for speaking performance practice |

2.2.2 Empirical Evidence of SWOT Impact on Speaking performance

In recent years, empirical research has increasingly examined the effect of SWOT analysis on EFL learners' speaking performance, particularly in educational contexts similar to Iraq. These studies highlight the role of SWOT analysis in promoting metacognitive awareness, learner independence, and improved oral communication performance.

1- Positive Effects on Speaking Performance Fluency and Accuracy

Several quantitative studies have shown that the systematic use of SWOT analysis significantly improves fluency and accuracy in speaking performance. Al-Mutairi and Al-Harhi (2021) reported that EFL secondary students who engaged in regular SWOT reflection outperformed those taught by conventional methods in speaking fluency and grammatical accuracy. These improvements were attributed to learners' increased awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, which encouraged focused practice. Similarly, Hassan and Abdullah (2022) found that SWOT analysis reduced speaking performance anxiety and supported more coherent speech and better classroom participation, supporting the view that identifying psychological threats such as anxiety enhances speaking outcomes (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

2- Enhancing Learner Autonomy and Motivation

From a qualitative perspective, SWOT analysis has been found to foster learner autonomy and motivation. Tran and Nguyen (2020) reported that EFL learners developed greater agency and independence after identifying personal opportunities such as online conversation partners or cultural clubs. In addition, teacher interviews indicated that SWOT promoted individualized feedback and learner-centered teaching practices, contributing to students' intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan,

2020). This is particularly important in contexts where rigid educational systems limit participatory learning (Al-Khatib & Al-Khateeb, 2021).

3- Application in Diverse Educational Contexts

Studies conducted in contexts similar to Iraq demonstrate the flexibility of SWOT analysis. Al-Balawi (2022) found that tenth-grade students showed improved speaking confidence and interactional skills after a semester of SWOT implementation. Likewise, Zainab and Omar (2023) reported a positive relationship between students' reflective SWOT logs and oral presentation performance when combined with digital language portfolios, indicating that guided reflection supports deeper learning and higher speaking performance competence (Moon, 2004).

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and sample

The population of the present study consisted of Iraqi EFL fifth-grade secondary school students in Baghdad during the academic year 2024–2025. From this population, a purposive sample of 60 female students was selected from Al-Yarmouk Secondary School. The participants were divided into two equal groups: an experimental group and a control group, each consisting of 30 students. Both groups were taught by the same teacher to minimize instructor-related variables and ensure consistency in instruction.

The selection of fifth-grade secondary students was based on their level of maturity and their ability to engage in reflective strategies such as SWOT analysis. In addition, these students were not involved in ministerial examinations during the academic year, which allowed uninterrupted implementation of the experimental procedures. The groups were randomly assigned to represent the experimental and control conditions, as illustrated in the study tables.. Selection of A and B groups are also randomly selected

to represent the experiment and controlled groups respectively as in table (3.2)

Table 3.1 sample of the study

| Group | Section | Number of Students |
|-------|--------------|--------------------|
| CG | A | 30 |
| EG | B | 30 |
| | Total | 60 |

3.2 The Experimental Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental design using a pre-test and post-test control group model. Experimental research aims to examine cause-and-effect relationships by manipulating an independent variable and measuring its impact on a dependent variable (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2022). In the present study, the independent variable was the SWOT strategy, while the dependent variable was students' speaking performance.

Both the experimental and control groups were administered a speaking performance pre-test at the beginning of the study to ensure group equivalence. After the instructional period, the same speaking performance test was administered as a post-test. The experimental group received instruction based on the SWOT strategy, whereas the control group was taught using the traditional teaching method prescribed in the Iraqi EFL curriculum. This design allowed for accurate comparison between the two groups and evaluation of the effectiveness of the SWOT strategy.

Table 3.2 the experimental design

| GROUP | TEST | INDEPENDENT VARIABLE | TEST |
|-------|----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| EG | Pre-test | SWOT Strategy | Speaking Performance post-test |
| CG | Pre-test | Traditional Teaching Method | Speaking Performance post-test |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|------|
| | | | test |
|--|--|--|------|

3.3 Instruments

To achieve the aim of the study, a speaking performance post-test was used as the main research instrument. Consistency in instrumentation is essential to avoid measurement bias and ensure reliable results (Salkind, 2022). The same scoring criteria and procedures were applied throughout the study.

3.3.1 The Speaking Performance Post-test

The speaking performance test was administered in the form of a structured interview, which is widely recognized as an effective tool for assessing oral communication skills (Fulcher, 2010). The post-test consisted of two phases. The first phase included warm-up questions designed to reduce anxiety and establish rapport with students and was not included in scoring. The second phase involved picture description and guided speaking tasks intended to elicit spontaneous speech on familiar and unfamiliar topics.

Students' speaking performance was assessed using Brown's (2001) analytic scoring rubric, which evaluates five parameters: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. Each parameter was rated on a five-point scale to obtain an overall speaking performance score. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate assessment and allow for later analysis.

3.4 Validity

Two types of validity are examined:

3.4.1 Face validity

Face validity refers to the degree to which a test appears to measure what it is intended to measure based on expert judgment (Taherdoost, 2020). In the present study, face validity was established by presenting the speaking performance test and scoring rubric to a panel of specialists in English language teaching from Iraqi universities. The experts reviewed the clarity, relevance, and suitability of the test items and agreed that the instrument

was appropriate for measuring students' speaking performance in relation to the aims of the study.

3.4.2 Construct Validity

Construct validity is the term that is applied to describe how a test measures what it is intended to measure (Stuart-Hamilton, 2007). In other words, it demonstrates the degree at which the test is capable of measuring the skill or concept that he or she is exploring (Bruce et al., 2008). To achieve construct validity, test item statistical tests are conducted including item difficulty and item discrimination power. This is intended to ensure that the test will be able to measure the performance skill of speaking as desired.

3.5 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of an assessment tool in producing stable results over time and across raters (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). To ensure reliability, two independent raters evaluated students' speaking performance using the same scoring rubric. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Pearson correlation coefficient, yielding a value of (0.809), which indicates a strong level of agreement. In addition, internal consistency reliability was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a value of (0.862), indicating high reliability (Stevens, 2007; Taber, 2021).

3.5.1 Reliability of the Speaking Performance Test

Reliability refers to the degree to which a tool provides consistent and repeatable results across different testing occasions or raters. In educational and psychological research, reliability represents the consistency of scores obtained regardless of time or administrator (Lodico et al., 2010). Similarly, Murphy and Davidshofer (2005) emphasize that a reliable instrument measures what it is designed to measure when applied in different situations or by different raters. To ensure the credibility of the

speaking performance test used in this study, two reliability measures were employed.

1. Inter-Rater Reliability

Inter-rater reliability measures the level of agreement between two or more assessors rating the same performance. This technique is essential for subjective assessments such as speaking performance tasks (Khalid, 2017). In the present study, two trained English teachers independently scored the participants' interviews. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the degree of agreement, yielding a coefficient of (0.809), which indicates a fairly strong inter-rater consistency.

2. Internal Consistency using Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to determine the internal consistency of the speaking performance test. This coefficient measures the extent to which test items are correlated. The obtained alpha value was (0.862), indicating high internal reliability. Cronbach's Alpha was computed using the standard formula (Stevens, 2007; Taber, 2021), confirming that the test items consistently measure the intended construct.

4. Results

To achieve the aim of this study and to verify its hypothesis, appropriate statistical methods were employed, leading to the following results:

4.1.1 Results Related to The Null Hypothesis

To achieve the aim of the study and test the research hypothesis, appropriate statistical procedures were applied to analyze the data obtained from the speaking performance post-test. The null hypothesis stated that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental group taught using the SWOT strategy and the control group taught using the traditional method.

The results of the post-test revealed that the experimental group achieved a higher mean score ($M = 18.43$, $SD = 4.48$) compared to the control group ($M = 16.63$, $SD = 4.74$). The computed t-value (2.158) exceeded the tabulated value (2.002) at the 0.05 level of significance, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups in favor of the experimental group. Accordingly, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted, confirming the effectiveness of the SWOT strategy in improving students' speaking performance, table (4.1).

Table (4.1). the mean score, standard deviation and t-test value for the research groups in the post-test of speaking performance

| Tests | Groups | N | Mean | SD | T values | | DF | Level of Significant | Result |
|-----------|--------|----|-------|------|----------|-----------|----|----------------------|-------------|
| | | | | | Computed | Tabulated | | | |
| Post test | EG | 30 | 18.43 | 4.48 | 2.158 | 2.002 | 29 | 0.05 | Significant |
| | CG | 30 | 16.63 | 4.74 | | | 29 | | |

4.2 Discussion of the Results

The findings reveal that the SWOT strategy was highly effective in enhancing the speaking performance of EFL students in Iraqi secondary schools. The improvement in the experimental group's performance shows that:

1. The EG had shown better performance in speaking than the CG in the post-test. This has been attributed to the SWOT strategy that enabled students to improve their speaking performance by using organized stages/steps that demanded them to put in their strengths, weaknesses, threat and opportunity.
2. SWOT strategy is made up of four steps each in which a huge number of tools of thought are incorporated, which gives it the flexibility to use SWOT to encourage creative classroom environment.

The findings align with the available literature (e.g., Alshammari, 2021; Rahimi and Ghanbari, 2022) that established that the metacognitive and

strategic strategies can effectively help in improving the language speaking performance.

4.3 Recommendations

In light of the results and conclusions of the present study, the following recommendation can be presented:

1. Incorporate the SWOT strategy into the EFL speaking courses in the secondary level which enables them to comprehend the various learning conditions into the curricula.
2. Conduct English language teacher training programs on implementation of SWOT analysis in classroom speaking lessons that will boost self-awareness, motivation and oral communication performance planning and improvement of students.
3. Provide students with the examples of self-evaluation and goal-setting strategies in language learning process and encourage them to use them to assist in their speaking performance.
4. Use classroom speaking activities which are modeled around the strengths and opportunities identified amongst students and address the weaknesses and possible threats, so that learning is more personalized and meaningful.
5. Include frequent reflective exercises in which students are able to examine their progress as per the SWOT framework, and develop a tendency of constant improvement and self-observation.
6. Develop supportive materials and resources, such as worksheets and guides, to help both teachers and students effectively implement SWOT analysis in speaking activities.
7. Promote cooperative learning activities with students sharing and discussing their SWOT analysis with others and thus helpful learning environment and sharing of methods to improve.

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